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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 006706

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR INR/I, NEA AND PRM

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TAGS: [PINR](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [JO](#) [KPRP](#)

SUBJECT: PALESTINIAN REFUGEES AND THE RIGHT OF RETURN: THE
VIEW FROM JORDAN (C-NE2-01206)

REF: A. STATE 209364

[B](#). AMMAN 5912

[C](#). AMMAN 1805

Classified By: Amb. Edward W. Gnehm for reasons 1.5 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (S) Following more than two years of Israeli-Palestinian violence and Israel's intense and still ongoing military operations in the West Bank and Gaza, few if any Palestinian refugees in Jordan are focused on the right of return. In the eyes of Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Israeli government policies and the evisceration of the Palestinian Authority have made any discussion of final settlement irrelevant for the moment. Moreover, with new Israeli elections and the possibility of war in Iraq looming, most Palestinian refugees in Jordan are deeply worried that the Israeli Government will seize the opportunity to move large numbers of Palestinians from the West Bank (ref b). Although the GOJ continues to plan its position for final status talks, questions of compensation and right of return are not the most important issues on Palestinian refugees' minds these days. Nevertheless, we offer the following in response to ref a request for information.

[1](#)2. (S) The vast majority of the 1.7 million registered Palestinian refugees resident in Jordan enjoy citizenship and (nearly) full rights. We believe that a sizeable majority -- especially those Palestinian-Jordanians who are economically well-established -- would not/not seek to exercise their right of return in the event of a political settlement. An estimated 100,000 Gazans, concentrated in Jerash and Aqaba, do not hold Jordanian citizenship. These, as well as less economically advantaged refugees who still live in the camps, would be more inclined to accept an offer of return to a new Palestinian state.

[1](#)3. (S) The public GOJ position and public statements made by refugees themselves insist on the right of return, and these public positions are unlikely to change. However, private discussions with GOJ officials and refugees alike reveal a general acceptance of the notion that most Palestinian refugees in Jordan would not exercise that theoretical right. While most refugees would like the right to travel to historical Palestine (including ancestral homes inside Green Line Israel), most privately acknowledge that their lives and livelihoods are irreplaceably rooted in Jordan.

[1](#)4. (S) For Palestinian refugees resident in Jordan, the most contentious issue in final status talks likely would be the question of who would receive financial compensation for relinquishing the right of return. Palestinian refugees in Jordan, according to several prominent Palestinian politicians we have spoken to over the past two years, will expect direct cash payments for their personal relinquishment of the right of return. A "flash" payment of the sort envisioned in the Taba talks likely would prove acceptable to Palestinian refugees resident in Jordan; any settlement that would not include a direct payment would provoke serious discontent.

[1](#)5. (S) The GOJ, still plugging away at research in anticipation of a settlement, will also seek compensation for its own substantial expenditures for "hosting" Palestinian refugees since 1948. Then-GOJ peace process coordinator Marouf Bakhit (now the Jordanian Ambassador in Ankara) told PolCouns in September that the GOJ continues to work on "credible" numbers for use in negotiations on compensation, calculating the number of refugees and displaced persons at 1.46 million. The GOJ reports that it has already expended nearly USD 4 billion on health care and education for Palestinian refugees and would seek matching compensation. Bakhit said the GOJ would use a significant portion of any compensation to rehabilitate refugee camps in Jordan, since they generally fall below the standards of other Jordanian urban areas for services, and symbolize the "outsider" status of Palestinian refugees.

[1](#)6. (S) The rejectionist groups resident in Jordan have been surprisingly quiet on all political questions following the GOJ's stern April 2002 warning against any activities that could threaten internal stability (ref c). GOJ Department of

Palestinian Affairs Director Abdulkarim Abulhaija has repeatedly told RefCoord that rejectionist groups understand that GOJ security services will react "quickly and cruelly if necessary" to maintain order, and they are keeping a low profile. As a result, there have been few and only minor protests or other organized political activities in the refugee camps in the last six months. Although we are not privy to internal discussions of rejectionist groups, we suspect that they -- like the Palestinian refugee population at large -- are focused more on current Israeli government policies and perceived strategic threat to the Palestinian people and far less on the question of final status negotiating positions.

GNEHM